

## **CHAPTER-2**

### **ADORATION AND RITUALS OF NAYAKS**

The Hindu religious ritual called puja, literally “adoration,” is the central activity in most temples. It is Conducted by a priest, or pujari. Puja is similar to a grand reception for a king. The ritual can last from ten minutes to several hours. Each puja adheres to the same fundamental structure. First, the pujari purifies himself, the sacred implements and the place of worship. He chants in Sanskrit the time, place and nature of this particular puja. Through hand gestures, mudras and mantras, he beseeches the Deity to come and dwell in the image.<sup>1</sup> Ringing a bell and intoning mantras and hymns from the ancient Vedas and Agamas, the pujari then offers precious substances to the Deity, including water, uncooked rice, holy ash, sandalwood paste and kumkum.<sup>2</sup> Some rites include a ritual bath, called abhishekam, in which water, sesame oil, turmeric water, saffron, milk, yogurt, ghee, honey, lime juice, vibhuti, sandalwood paste, panchamritam (mixture of five fruits), coconut water and rosewater are poured over the Deity.<sup>3</sup> Devotees are seated during most of the puja, usually on the floor. After abhishekam, the Deity is dressed in new clothes and beautifully decorated with flowers. At this point, devotees may sing devotional songs. After decorating the Deity, the pujari offers incense,

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1. Srinivasan Sabhrathinam, ***Major Poojas in South india***,2016, Chennai,p.67
  2. Vijayalakshmi srinivasan, ***Major Poojas in South india***,2023,Chennai,p.134
  3. S.S.Janaki, ***Siva Temples and Temple Rituals***, Madras,1988,p.64.

oil lamps and food. He offers flowers while chanting names of the God. <sup>4</sup> At the high point of the puja, a large lamp is waved before the Deity and bells are rung loudly as God sends his power through the holy image of Himself. When the lamp is lowered, everyone prostrates to the Divine. The lamp is then carried out to bless the worshipers, who often leave a donation on the tray or later in the temple offering box. <sup>5</sup> Finally, depending on the tradition, sacraments such as sacred ash, blessed water, sandalwood paste, kumkum, fruit, sweets and flowers are passed out to bless all present. These include a portion of the offerings—flowers, cooked food and more—brought by devotees. <sup>6</sup> Devotees may then sit in meditation, basking in the blessings invoked by the puja. At the end of the puja, the priest passes out to the attending devotees various substances that were offered to the Deity. By partaking of these offerings, called Prasada, one absorbs the blessings into one's being.<sup>7</sup> Observe the way experienced temple-goers receive these sacraments to properly learn the nuanced customs. First, the sacramental lamp which has just been offered at the high point of the puja is passed among the devotees. The devas can see and bless devotees through this flame as it lights up their face. Sometimes devotees, too, can glimpse into their world. When the priest comes to devotees with the lamp, reach out and pass both hands devoutly over the flame. Then bring hands back, turn palms toward devotees face and touch his eyes with your fingertips to

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4. M.D.Chaturvedi, ***Hindu Tradition and Philosophy***, New Delhi, 1979, p.64

5. D.Dayalan, ***Early Temples of Tamil Nadu, Their Role in Socio – Economic Life***, New Delhi, 1992, p.86.

6. B.Banerjee, ***Hindu Culture, Custom and Ceremony***, Delhi, 1979, p.193.

7. S.S.Janaki, ***Siva Temples and Temple Rituals***, Madras, 1988, p.64.

receive the Deity's blessings.<sup>8</sup> In some temples, the devotees take turns passing the arati flame in front of the murtis while singing "Jai Jagadish Hare. At a shrine to Lord Vishnu, the priest may bring out the Deity's silver or gold crown and lightly touch it to the head of each devotee. This represents God's feet being placed on devotees head.<sup>9</sup> A sacrament offered at Siva shrines is holy ash, vibhuti, made by burning dried cow dung with ghee, flowers, yogurt and other ingredients. It symbolizes the purity we attain by burning the bonds of ego, karma and maya to reveal the soul's natural goodness. It is applied on the forehead, generally three broad stripes for men, and one short stroke for ladies.<sup>10</sup> A spoonful of blessed water that was offered to the Deity, or milk with which the Deity was bathed during the puja, may be offered for devotees to drink.<sup>11</sup> Sandalwood paste, valued for its fragrance, is often next. A small dab is placed in devotees hand by the priest, which devotees transfer to their left palm with a wiping motion. Dip their right ring finger into the paste and apply it with a small circular motion between the eyebrows, or in their chosen sectarian mark.<sup>12</sup> A red powder called kumkum is then given. The priest will place a small pinch in devotees right hand or invite them to take some from the container

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8. ibid

9. K.V.Singh, ***Hindu Rites and Rituals, origin and meanings***, New delhi, 2015,p.121

10. Coward, Harold G., ***Hindu Ethics: Purity, Abortion, and Euthanasia***. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.p.65

11. Knipe, David M. ***Hinduism: Experiments in the Sacred***. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.p.114

12. Milner, Murray, Jr. "***Hindu Eschatology and the Indian Caste System: An Example of Structural Reversal***." The Journal of Asian Studies 52, no. 2 (May 1993): 298-319.

he holds before you. Apply the kumkum on top of the sandalwood, creating a dot, or bindi, which represents the third eye of spiritual seeing.<sup>13</sup> Vaishnava Hindus traditionally apply a V-shaped tilaka on the forehead representing the feet of the Lord. Flowers may also be distributed by the priest, as well as cooked food. Many devotees wrap portions of their prasada to share with loved ones or place on their home altar.<sup>14</sup>

These poojas are performed mostly in Temples. Temples are the supreme locus for puja, the sacred rites of Hindu worship. As the home of the deity, the temple becomes a major focus for awakening of the spiritual life in the community. Such is the faith with which the devotees worship the gods by attending on him for all the routines of a day as the human beings serve to themselves. Ardent devotees remember the Almighty at every winking of the eye and even in every moment of breathing.<sup>15</sup> Divine grace permeates the temple premises and inside the temple shrine, serenity and tranquility prevail accompanied by fragrance of the flowers, incense, offerings, the chanting of the hymns, charming of the bells, beating the drums, choric recital of the god's glorious name by the devotees are renting the air.<sup>16</sup> Ritual is beautiful, an enactment of offering and service that is central to Bhakti, and which creates the community of worshippers. A

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13. S. Radhakrishnan, ***The Hindu View of Life*** (New Delhi: Indus, 1993; p.64.

14. Walker, Benjamin. ***The Hindu World. 2 vols.*** New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968.P.123

15. Falk, N. A. (2005). ***Puja: Hindu Puja, in Encyclopedia of Religion***, Lindsay Jones (ed.), USA: Macmillan, 11(2a), 7493-7578

16. Gligor, M. (2009). ***Performing puja in Hinduism.*** The achievement of identity between God and worshiper. Series Humanistica, ,pp- 275-285

common perception is that Bhakti, the melting (urugi) of the soul evoked by Manikkavasakar, cannot be contained by ritual, or karya-kand, and is indeed precluded by going through the motions mechanically.<sup>17</sup> Yet performing or participating in ceremonies can embody a unique experience of the sacred, of which a photo essay can convey but a glimpse. Puja is the Sanskrit term for worship, Poosai in Tamil. Pujas are the daily offerings where as festivals are conducted periodically and on special occasions.<sup>18</sup> The *puja* is the method for calling the omnipresent to confine itself in the *garbhagraha* ; the dark sanctum of the temple for the benefit of the creature. Pujas are two kinds viz. athmartham which is performed by individuals in houses and parathuvam is performed by the priests in the temples.<sup>19</sup> When once the deity is visualized as a king, He is also thought to be pleased with offerings with which man is pleased.<sup>20</sup> The Nayaks ensured the performance of poojas and rituals in proper time, looked after the proper supply of materials needed for poojas and so they became the royal patrons of the temples and custodians of Hinduism.<sup>21</sup> Thirumalai Nayak arranged poojas, festivals and free food distribution schemes. He was very prompt in his duties in which he used to check the food, prepared at madapalli or

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17. S.V.Varadarajan, ***Indian Temples and Festivals at a Glance***, Chennai, 2007, P.58

18. ***Tamil Lexigon, Vol VI***, University of Madras, 1982, p.3545.

19. K.K.Menon, ***Madurai Temple***, Madurai Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Kumbhabishekam Souvenir, Madurai, 1963. P.234

20. M.Arunachalam, ***Saiva Siddhanta***, article in Religious Philosophies of Indian Origin, Vol.6, Vivekananda Prakashan Kendra, 1977, p. 203.

21. R.Panchannatham Pillai, ***Madurai Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundare swarar ThirukkivilVaralaru***, Meenakshi Amman Temple Publications, Madurai, 1988, p.70.

kitchen of Sri Meenakshi Temple, before it was offered to God and people. The Nayaks, built a mandapam, in front of Meenakshi Temple, called nagara manadapam, in order to house the music drum called nagara murasu which made loud noise and sound, and through that, the time of the poojas, in the Meenakshi Temple was made known to the public. Almost all the Nayak Kings had interest, veneration, admiration and adoration for Hinduism and spent most of their wealth on constructing and renovating temples, which became the radiating centres of culture of the land.<sup>22</sup> Some rituals, like Puja, remind us of god on a daily basis. Other rituals such as fasting, and meditation discipline our life for spiritual progress. Religious ceremonies or pilgrimages help us focus the mind on spiritual aspirations.<sup>23</sup> Some ceremonies such as rites of passage bring family and community together. The discipline of regularly carrying out rituals encourages religious values and aspirations. In our multi faith environment this also brings the opportunity to learn about each other's faith. Some rituals can become mechanical and meaningless thus becoming counterproductive.<sup>24</sup> Hinduism offers freedom in the way rituals can be carried out, but this freedom could unfortunately be used as an excuse to abandon rituals as society becomes more superficial with rituals becoming commercialised or stifling. Some critics of religion may also argue that money and time could have been better spent in caring for the needy. Rituals are created with wisdom and

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22. Radhakrishnan, S. ***The Hindu View of Life***. New Delhi: 1993.p.123

23. Edward C. Sachau , ***The Hindu Tradition***. New York:, 1972.p.79

24. Knipe, David M. ***Hinduism: Experiments in the Sacred***. San Francisco, 1991.p.113

may over time become corrupt and tools for exploitation. It must be able to eliminate corruption and adapt the technique which was developed in ancient civilisation. Devotees pray to Lord Ganesh before commencing any form of auspicious activity or occasion. Auspicious things are offered to Lord Ganesha's murti that possess medicinal properties which are absorbed by the clay crafted figurines. The murti can activate the human neural system, infusing a belief that whatever is asked for in the prayer, shall be showered upon by the Lord in abundance. Devotees can see this when entering in mandirs or temples, where at the entrance a statue of Lord Ganesh can always be seen. He provides with the knowledge of starting new things with a pure and selfless mind in achieving all aspirations with utmost devotion.<sup>25</sup> To observe poojas the first step followed by devotees is standing in front of the deities and bringing the hands together with palms touching each other and fingers facing upwards termed as Namaste. This practice was followed during the period of Nayaks.<sup>26</sup> It is a common form of greeting practiced in the Indian subcontinent. It is a gesture used to greet and before parting. We can see this gesture in many Indian classical dances, in everyday religious rituals and also yoga postures. Namaste is derived from Sanskrit language. "Nama" means "bow", "as" means "I" and "te" means "you". This translates to "I bow to you". Namaskaar, similarly translates to "bow" and "doing" and describes the act of performing the greeting.<sup>27</sup> That is why it is said Namaskaar has more satvikta to it as compared to Namaste.

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25. K.V.Singh, ***Hindu Rites and Rituals, origin and meanings***, New delhi, 2015,p.121

26. ibid

27. ibid

But again, according to many theories, Namaskaar is performed when greeting multiple people whereas Namaste is used widely as a personal greeting addressed to an individual. Bring your hands together with palms touching each other and fingers facing upwards. your hands should be close to your body in line with your heart level, then bow your head with closed eyes. It is a gesture conveying the deepest form of respect. When we bring our hands to heart level, it also signifies that we are interceding with the divine love from our heart. Also, it's quite important to not hold anything in our hands whilst bringing your hand together. Bowing your head with closed eyes helps our mind to surrender to this divine love. This mudra is also called Anjali mudra or Pranamasana (the prayer pose).<sup>28</sup> Namaste is a gesture we usually do when we greet others, or when taking leave after finishing off a lesson to give respect to your teacher, students, colleagues. It helps for a spiritual connection between the teacher and students. Namaskaar is a great way of expressing your love, respect to the other person. When it comes to worshipping Deity, it signifies greetings to God. It is also done when doing meditation which connects you to your inner self. Namaste literally means 'the divine in me pays respect, honours, bows, adores the divine in you'.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as according to the Spiritual Research Foundation, the lack of physical contact in Namaste substantially limits the negative entity of one person affecting the other person. If it is done in the right spiritual emotion of paying obeisance, it potentially eliminates the

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28. Gligor, M. ***Performing puja in Hinduism. The achievement of identity between God and worshiper.*** Series Humanistica, 2009,8, p.275-285

29. Falk, N. A. ***Puja: Hindu Puja, in Encyclopedia of Religion***, USA,2005. p. 7493-7578



negative vibrations completely. Namaste is a gesture, a way of acknowledging and paying obeisance of one soul to another. It is the most Sattvik form of greeting. These type of rituals are performed by temple priest in poojas. Mostly important poojas are performed in early morning. The Nayaks also had the practice of performing poojas in the early morning.<sup>30</sup> In Sanskrit the daily routine is called Dinacharya. 'Din' meaning day and 'acharya' meaning to follow or close to. Dinacharya is the ideal daily schedule, taking into account the cycle of nature, and the routine followed in the early morning, which is instrumental in setting the tone of the day. Following a daily routine gives a person a sense of discipline and this is important for the efficient functioning of their body and mind.<sup>31</sup> The ideal Hindu ritual of waking up early starts in the Muhurat meaning auspicious time of the Brahmamuhurt, the creator's time. A person should wake up 1hr minutes before sunrise so they can synchronise with the rhythm of the sun. At this point there is a shift in the energy in the atmosphere. Half an hour before sunrise there is another surge of positive energy moving into the atmosphere. It is thought that in this period of time the Sattva intellect is pure and radiant and it is the best period for performing tasks related to the pursuits of dharma (righteousness) and artha (wealth) and for contemplating on Vedic principles and self analysis.<sup>32</sup> Surrounding negative

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30. Arvind Sharma, ***The Hindu Tradition- Religious Beliefs and Healthcare Decisions***, Canada, 2002, p.2

31. K.V.Singh, ***Hindu Rites and Rituals, origin and meanings***, New delhi, 2015,p.81

32. Kolenda, P. ***Religious Anxiety and Hindu Fate. In Religion in South Asia***, Seattle,1964, Washington .p.145

during this time and this will help in improving mental health and energy is also considered to reduce during this time. The early morning rituals are cited in the Hindu texts and would be based in India where generally sunrise and sunset are constant. In the UK with the changing seasons the daylight timings vary, and it would be a challenge to adjust through the year but it is important to understand the significance of a constant early wake up time. In summary, although the Hindu texts cite prayers and rituals to perform on waking, the scientific reasoning behind them is for the person to start the day with clarity of thought, a peaceful mind and a clean and healthy body through diet and exercise. These are universal principles for all to follow, whatever your faith.<sup>33</sup> In Hindu culture lighting the lamp has great significance apart from just removing the darkness. The Nayaks followed the same practice during their tenure in Madurai. For every auspicious occasion, the first thing the Nayaks Practised is lighting an oil lamp. It has been an age old household practice to light a lamp in the morning/twilight time. We have many occasions and festivities to show the effect of lighting lamps, such as the inauguration of an event to symbolise an auspicious beginning.<sup>34</sup> When a ghee lamp is lit and kept nearby, it creates an aura of illumination. This radiance of the lamp sets forth electromagnetic waves that open up the mind and activate the sensory areas of the brain. During worship it enhances the performance of the individual allowing worship to

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33. Milner, Murray, Jr. "***Hindu Eschatology and the Indian Caste System: An Example of Structural Reversal.***" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 1993):298-319.

34. *ibid.*, p.320

the lord with all concentration and attention. Light signifies knowledge and positivity. Despite obvious distinctions between tilak styles, it always rests between the eyebrows and shows conformity to Sanatan Dharma. The practice has existed since ancient times and continued by Nayaks. Now it is a signature part of Hindu culture.<sup>35</sup> Sandalwood, or 'chandan' is a very common ingredient in tilak, and it represents for Hindus. This practise existed during the tenure of Nayaks in Madurai. Whilst applying sandalwood tilak, it has a cooling effect and pure aroma which can have massively beneficial effects on the brain. According to Chinese acupunctural sciences, the tilak is applied on the skin covering a convergence point of nerves. Here, the cooling properties come into their own by reducing headaches and calming the mind.<sup>36</sup> Besides this, its aforementioned fragrance promotes purity and peace in the mind, so devotees can worship in tranquility. Chakra is a Sanskrit term meaning wheel and according to ancient Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas there are seven of these energy channels located in the body. One, called 'ajna' or the third eye, is located between the eyebrows. This chakra is responsible for the mind's ability to concentrate and observe, so applying tilak on this area can activate the third eye and stimulate concentration.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, Ayurveda, an Indian healing system dating back thousands of years, describes Sandalwood as the ultimate the forehead. Growing up near the coast in India, coconuts were offered

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35. K.V.Singh, ***Hindu Rites and Rituals, origin and meanings***, New delhi, 2015,p.141

36. Radhakrishnan, S. ***The Hindu View of Life***. New Delhi: 1993,p.134

37. B.Banerjee, ***Hindu Culture, Custom and Ceremony***, Delhi, 1979, p.93.

sedative. Having problems with anxiety, insomnia, or nerve pain? Sandalwood can be used to soothe these maladies by applying its tilak onto God as it was commonly grown there. Every Tuesday and Friday devotees would go to the temple with coconuts. This practise is followed in Madurai Meenakshi temple till today. It existed during the tenure of Nayaks. Offering coconut to God ensures that he or she surrenders his ego to the deities before they begin the prayer. One can devote himself to God by understanding the underlying importance of offering coconut. Hindus also strongly believe that they can become a part of the Almighty who governs the entire universe only by throwing away our ego.<sup>38</sup> The coconut is the most Satvic fruit and the purest form of fruit. We call it Kalpvriksha; no part of the tree is thrown away as each part is useful. For this reason, the coconut plays a major role, not only as an offering to God but also it is a significant fruit in almost all religious festivals as Prashad. Coconuts are also used in welcoming guests at weddings. Another explanation defined the outer shell of a coconut like the human being's large external physical body and the kernel inside a coconut represents the delicate internal body. The removal of the hard-outer cover of the coconut signifies that one should be totally devoid of desires to reach God. Since the best way to God is to be egoless and unattached to the physical body, breaking the coconut represents the shattering of our ego, which will then lead to the inner juice which is usually removed before offering to God and this shows the removal of the internal tendencies of our brain to be jealous, egoist and selfish. Another important adoration performed during the time of Nayaks were

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38. Srinivasan, K.R., ***Temples of South India***, New Delhi, 1993, pp.184-185.

Yagnas. It is a Vedic tradition and has been a part of an humans. This leaves just the soft inner part of the fruit which is placed before God as a symbolic offering.<sup>39</sup> It has deep philosophical importance which has been forgotten by worshipers and is performed more out of belief than true understanding of its significance. Agni is the Hindu god of fire and also the messenger of the Devas (gods). A yagna traditionally requires wood or cow dung and ghee to maintain the flame. Milk, rice, grains, and fruits are called havan samagari and are offered as nourishment to the fire. By the act of invoking a fire, the offerings are believed to be carried by Agni to the Devas.<sup>40</sup> The yagna can only be performed by a Brahmin, who is suitably qualified as a priest. He or she will chant sanskrit prayers and instruct the participants of the yagna to offer samagari to the fire. This offering represents one's ego and desires and are surrendered to the Agni. The Devas in return for these offerings, bestow boons and blessings upon the participants.<sup>41</sup> Once the offerings have burnt away the ash, known in sanskrit as vibhuti, is applied to the seven chakras of the body. Many people often apply it to the forehead (agna chakra), to the throat (vishuddhi chakra) and at the centre of the chest near the heart (anahata chakra). It is said that applying the vibhuti to the chakras acts to purify the body. Conducting a yagna is also thought to make the atmosphere pure and holy and therefore many people undertake yagnas within their homes.<sup>42</sup> There are many

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39. Madura Collectorate Records, Vol. 9077. (No Date) p. 13.

40. Robert Sewell, **List of Antiquities**, Madras, II, No.92.

41. K.V.Singh, **Hindu Rites and Rituals, origin and meanings**, New delhi, 2015,p.141

42. S.George Michael, **The Hindu Temple**, New Delhi, 1977, p.58.

different reasons an individual may wish to conduct a yagna. Rajasuya yagna was performed as part of the ceremonies for the consecration of a King, Ashvamedh yagna was performed by Kings to expand their empire, it was practised by Nayaks. Putrakameshthi yagna was performed by those who desired to have a child, and Vastu yagna for occupying a new house. There are many more types of yagnas to fulfill many of one's desires. Yagna continues to play an important role in many Hindu's rites of passage, such as weddings and funerals.<sup>43</sup> There are 12 types of yagnas explained by Lord Krishna in the Bhagvad Gita:Deva yagna, Brahma yagna, Indriya yagna, Mano yagna, Atma-samyama yagna, Dravya yagna, Tapo yagna, Yoga yagna, Swadhyaya yagna, Jnana yagna, Prana yagna and Deha yagna.Yagna is a very symbolic ritual and its performance has many interpretations. It is mentioned in numerous Hindu scriptures and has been performed for centuries. Its enduring significance is a testimony to the strength and power of Hindu beliefs.<sup>44</sup> Trees and plants have always been a divine source for humankind. Some scholars believe that trees and nature in general were worshiped by early humans before that of Gods and Goddesses. This could be because certain trees had medicinal or held symbolic purposes. The Nayaks protected a lot of trees nearby Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple in Madurai. Once such tree is the holy Peepal, which is the abode of ancestors and Lord Yama (Lord of Death). The Peepal tree is often planted outside the village near crematoriums and is one of the most worshipped trees in

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43. D.Devakunjari, **Madurai Through the Ages**, Meenakshi Sundareswarar Thirukkovil, Madurai, 2004, p.41.

44. V.Vedachalam and C. Bose, **Thirumalai Mannar Keiyedu (Tamil)**, Chennai, 1984, p.38.

India.<sup>45</sup> Also known as the Bodhi tree, the roots are said to represent Brahma, the trunk represents Vishnu and the leaves on the tree represent Shiva. Another example is the Ashoka tree which is associated with God of Love which is an evergreen that produces beautiful fragrant flowers. Like the holy Peepal the Tulsi plant is also considered to be auspicious and its leaves are used for worshipping Lord Vishnu and his many avatars as well as medicinal properties for treating various ailments. For many generations Hindu households have been keeping a Tulsi plant in their households and often worship and care for it daily like they would a murti of God. A lot of tulsi plant is surrounded near Meenaksi Sundareswarar temple in Madurai.<sup>46</sup> Recent botanical research studies have uncovered that the Tulsi plant enriches the environment with oxygen for around 20hrs of a day and absorbs other pollutants from the atmosphere. Similarly, Neem leaves are also commonly used in Ayurvedic medicine for its healing properties. The Banyan tree with its large and beautiful leaves is commonly recreated in rituals of worship. The Banyan Tree is mentioned in many ancient Indian texts and scriptures, representing the divine creator and symbolising longevity. As such, the tree and its leaves are never cut and only in the time of famine is it used for food.<sup>47</sup> The name 'Tulsi' is derived from Tulasi Devi, who was an eternal consort of Shri Krishna. The plant symbolises purity, promotes longevity and happiness and hence is an integral part of almost all

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45. T.V. Mahalingam and K. Palaniappan, The Great Temple of Madurai, Madurai, 1963, p.101.

46. Somalay, **Madurai Maavattam (in Tamil)**, Vedaranyam, 1980, p.54.

47. Madurai Sourastra Sabhai Ponvizha Malar, Madurai, 2002, p.11.

our Hindu ceremonies. A special Puja is performed after Diwali and Tulsi is adorned in the form of a goddess and decorated in the form of a bride.<sup>48</sup> Tulsi is rather extraordinary in comparison to just any other plant. Firstly, not all plants can be kept indoors, but Tulsi has a special place in the homes of many Hindus. The seeds, leaves, stem and even the roots and soil of the plant all have a beautiful scent. These are all considered to be holy and according to ancient beliefs, Tulsi is worshipped as the one who brings people closer to the divine form Krishna or Maha Vishnu. Using a single Tulsi leaf in the offerings to the Lord, sanctifies these offerings further. Such high value is given to the plant itself and it is even believed that placing Tulsi twigs in the funeral pyre helps the soul of the deceased attain Moksha.<sup>49</sup> Historically Hindu Dharma has held great significance for plants as they not only provide oxygen, food and shade or shelter, but medicine also. The Tulsi plant has many medicinal uses and Ayurveda recommends it for many ailments such as coughs, colds, and other viral infections, by eating a few leaves in the morning on an empty stomach. The plant is inexpensive and humble and comes loaded with so many benefits. Not only does it retain antibiotic, anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-carcinogenic properties, but it is loaded with phytonutrients, essential oils, Vitamin A and C and therefore a great remedy for facilitating proper digestion and also relief from stress.<sup>50</sup> Tulsi possesses major Ayurvedic properties, adding to its

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48. Nelson, H.H., *The Madura Country A Manual*, part-III (reprint) 1989, New Delhi, 1868, p. 164:

49. Jagadisa Ayyar, P.V., ***South Indian Shrines***, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 485. And 489.

50. S.George Michael, ***The Hindu Temple***, New Delhi, 1977, p.58.



numerous other attributes and values. Hindu Dharma teaches us to see divinity in all, this includes forms of nature, whether it be mountains, rivers, or any animal down to the smallest of insects. Plants in particular are revered as they are nature's largest processor of solar energy, and thus vital for our very existence. We worship all the elements of this nature as a matter of gratitude and are forever reminded that in their simplicity, there is divinity. The reverence for cows naturally developed into worship of cows during the Vedic eras, where the cows were an integral part of the ashrams and gurukuls, because her milk enabled them to produce the ghee and yoghurt which were required in day to day use for human consumption as well as for yagnas and puja. The Nayaks also considered cow as a sacred animal and it was used during the time of poojas.<sup>51</sup> The cow dung was used as manure to produce agricultural fertiliser, or dried to be used as fuel and a source of biogas to generate electricity and heat. Hindus therefore have further elevated Gaumata's status to that equal to the Divine Mother where she is depicted with different gods and goddesses residing at different parts of her body.<sup>52</sup> With science now showing the damaging effect to the planet's ecosystem with the increase in greenhouse effect, a direct cause of the industrialisation of the meat trade, and the cruelty of animals which is now prevalent in the dairy trade many people have decided to become vegan. When visiting a temple, people use the white ash, as three horizontal stripes, on the foreheads of priests or devotees. Or you will have seen called,

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51. V. Vedachalam and C. Bose, ***Thirumalai Mannar Keiyedu (Tamil)***, Chennai, 1984, p.18.

52. T. Vijayaraghunathan, ***The Great Temple of Madurai***, Madurai, 2002, p.83

it signifies the same thing – sacred ash that is made of burnt dried wood, cow dung, pictures of Lord Shiva with ash on his forehead or all over his body.<sup>53</sup> This ash is called Vibhuti, or Bhasma, or Thiruneer, but whatever name it is milk, ghee, and other herbs. What remains after all the products have been burnt is the white, pure ash, with all the impurities burnt away. One of the typical areas where the ash is applied is the forehead.<sup>54</sup> This practise was followed in Madurai during the tenure of Nayaks. It is still continuing in Madurai. it is believed that those who apply the ash can be protected from certain ailments, and therefore are given glory. The ash is considered to have medicinal value and can be found in many Ayurvedic medicines that help to absorb excess moisture from the body and that can help prevent colds and headaches.<sup>55</sup> As such, applying the ash can increase your positive energy. The holy ash should serve as a reminder to all Hindus. Hindus also observe fasting in the month of Shravana, which usually falls every year in July/August. People normally eat once a day for the whole month and most of them adopt a vegetarian diet while fasting. This practise was followed by the people of Madurai during the tenure of Nayaks. Fasting also has a direct effect on a person's spirituality. It relaxes the mind while cleansing the physical body. Fasting is a great time to remember the spiritual connection we have with our physical body.<sup>56</sup> Without the toxins we put in our bodies, we not only give our bodies a break from the digestive

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53. J. Bertrand, *La Mission Du Maduraie*, Vol.II, pp.271-280.

54. K.V.Singh, ***Hindu Rites and Rituals, origin and meanings***, New delhi, 2015,p.261

55. Ibid, p.262

56. Madura District History, 20 August 1816, M.C.R, Vol. 1258, p. 44.

process, but we also allow our spirit and soul to be detoxed. Because the body does not have to do the work of digestion, it has more energy to focus on the spiritual aspects. As seen from the above scientific research, fasting helps prevent and cure such a diverse spectrum of conditions and the above-mentioned benefits of Hindu fasting are just some of the many that western researchers are beginning to discover. India is the largest producer of this turmeric crop, the rhizomes of which are boiled and dried before any final processing for its various uses. The ground powder, haldi is used in most Indian cooking and of course at a wedding ritual too. Besides working as an effective exfoliating agent, leaving the skin fair and glowing, it also boosts the body's immunity.<sup>57</sup> The use of haldi dates back nearly 4000 years to the Vedic culture in India, where under the Ayurvedic system, it has a long history of medicinal use. It was practised during the ruling period of Nayaks. Haldi is an anti-inflammatory powerhouse and a natural antiseptic. The anti-cancer activity of a turmeric extract may inhibit the rapid multiplication of cancer cells. In some studies, haldi has been reported to have protective qualities against the development of skin, breast, oral and stomach cancers. The anti arthritic effects of haldi exhibited activity against joint inflammation.<sup>58</sup> To give more importance to Meenkashi Sundareshwarar Temple Poojas are performed in different times in Temples for the welfare of the devotees. It was performed by the Nayaks. It is a ritual worship with abisheka and floral offerings to the accompaniment of

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57. Falk, N. A. ***Puja: Hindu Puja, in Encyclopedia of Religion***, Lindsay  
2005.USA,11(2a), 7493-7578

58. Ibid p.7585

chanting of mantras . It has been used to designate those rituals which constitute worship. The day-to-day ceremonies connected with the worship are called Nitya –Puja.<sup>59</sup> The Brahmins were entrusted with the duties of performing Adoration and rituals in temples during Nayaks. They made proper arrangements for the regular conduct of rituals, poojas, and festivals, thereby, they, diplomatically, achieved peace and reconciliation in their state. The daily routine of rituals in the temple gave assured employment to a large number of people- priests, Brahmins learned in the Vedas, musicians, dancing girls, teachers, florists, tailors, clerks and accountants and functionaries of various kinds. The Nayaks observed the religious tradition of worshipping a female deity like Sakthi before commencing any work, such as declaring war.<sup>60</sup> The Nayak Kings revived the poojas and festivals in all the temples of their Kingdom. The poojas were largely based on the agamas which prescribed idol worship along with ceremonies celebrated periodically and annually. Usually there were five poojas on each day namely, Thiruvananthal (awakening the God) at about 6 a.m., Kala Sandhi at about 8 a.m., Uchikalam at about 11.30 a.m., Sayarakshi at about 6 p.m. and Arthasamam at about 8.00 p.m., were performed in all temples.<sup>61</sup> The priests who performed the poojas were called archakas. These priests after finishing their morning ablutions, would start their work by removing the perished garlands, cleaning the idols, decorating them,

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59. T.K.T. ViraRaghavacharya, **History of Tiruppati**, Madras, 1978, p.212.

60. M. Monier Williams, **Indian Wisdom**, London, 1921, p.226.

61. A.K. Paranthamanar, **Madurai NayakkarVaralaru** (in Tamil), Chennai, 1966 p.229

lighting the lamps, offering food or prasadam and reciting or singing special hymns or verses to invoke the Almighty. Then they would offer prasadam, kum-kum or vibuthi, flowers and holy water to the devotees. Pongal neivedyam or cooked rice was offered daily to the deities. This rice was cooked in a separate kitchen or madapalli in almost all the temples.<sup>62</sup> The Nayak King Virappa Nayak constructed Madapalli to Meenakshi Temple. If a temple was for Lord Shiva and his consort, then the priests used to sing the following Tamil verses at the time of the poojas: Thirumalai Nayak wanted, that the poojas in the temples to be performed by Sanskrit scholars and experts in vedas and puranas. He allowed the Sourastra priests to perform poojas in the Prasanna Venkateswara temple because the Sourastra priests were enjoying Brahmin's status and were learning Sanskrit scriptures. To give better administration and to implement the rules and regulations, Thirumalai Nayak attended, the Arthajama Pooja. <sup>63</sup> The Arthajama pooja is even now conducted in the name of Thirumalai Nayak Endowment.<sup>64</sup> Like Thirumalai Nayak, his Dalavay Ramappayan, while on his visit to Murugan Temple at Palani, learned that the priests of this temple belonged to Pandaram caste and were not well versed in vedas and scriptures. He refused to get prasatham from them and took efforts to bring five Aathi Saiva Gurukkal or Sanskrit scholars from Kodumudi, Maruthurai, Karur, Nattarayan Koil and Kadambar Koil. Among these five, he nominated Saraswathy Iyer of Kodumudi, to be the leader. Henceforth, only Aadi Saiva

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62. *ibid.*, p.230

63. *Ibid.*, p.234. 1

64. Valayapettai, Ra. Krishnan, ***The Great Temple of Madurai Meenakshi Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple***, Madurai, 2014, p.55.

Gurukkal was allowed to perform poojas at Palani Temple. Thus the Nayaks and their officials had staunch faith over poojas, which were to be performed scrupulously with purity and sanctity in the temples by priests and the vedic scholars. The concept of Sakthi and Grace is unique in Saiva Siddhanta. The consciousness-Force of Siva is separately termed His Sakthi. Both are one without a second; just as fire and heat are not separate; Siva and Sakthi are not separate. In addition to the daily pujas, the Madurai temple also contribute to the development of social contacts, by bringing together the far and near, during the times of grand festivals, when deities are mounted on specially constructed mounts called 'Vahanas' and taken around the temple in colourful procession.<sup>65</sup> Meenakshi temple festivals like the Chithirai Brahmotsavam are great cultural performances. They bring together great crowds of people in shared enthusiasm, and they call upon the efforts of many specialists and enormous resources to be performed successfully. During the Chitirai festival, the deities are taken to the Kulala mandapam inside the temple and stay there for the whole day. Kulalas are the potters who supply the puja pots. On the second day, the deities are taken to Muthuram Iyermandapam inside the temple and receive honours from the Muthaliar community. The Madurai temple pujas fall under three categories, namely, Nitya Pujas which are done daily, Masa visesham which are performed once a month and thirdly, Aandu visesham or festivals which are celebrated once a year. Daily pujas are offered according to the agamic shastras and are practically the same as they are

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65. K.Rajayyan,, ***History of Madurai, 1736-1801***, Madurai 1974, P.38.

in many Saiva temples.<sup>66</sup> The ritual today is practically what it has been for hundreds of years past. An important part of temple ritual is the Ashtabhandhanam or the fixing of idols which has to be done strictly according to the agamic Shastras. The Ashtabhandhanam refers to the fixing of Mulava bheras, of stone images on their pedestals. The chedibhandhanam refers to the fixing of the professional or bronze images on their pedestals. The pujas in the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple are performed according to the Saiva agamas. Basically there are twenty eight agamas. They belong to 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>67</sup> According to the agamas, the pujas held in the temple are of three components namely Nityam – ritual which are performed daily. Naimittikam - occasionally and Kamyam - privately. Daily worship is conducted according to Parartha Nitya Puja rules expounded in the Saivite Kamika and Karana – Agamas. The concerned priests of the temple should perform these Pujas. The method of these three pujas are of again three types; - Saangam, Upangam and Pratyangam. Saangam consists of eight parts namely Abhishekam, Padhyam, Aasamiyam, Arkkigam, Vasthram, Aparnam, Sandanam and Pushpam. Upangam consists of Toopam, Deepam, Vibhuti Anivithal, Kudai, Kannadi, Samaram, Visiri, Viyagnam, Nartanam and Geethavatyam. Pratyangam follows six types: namely Nivetyam, Pali, Homam, Nityotsavam, Sulukotakatanam and Swastivasanam. All these twenty four types of pujas together are called as Saangopanga Pratyangam.<sup>68</sup> Basically, puja consists of sixteen acts of

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66. Francis, W., Madura District Gazetteer, New Delhi, 2000, p.115.

67. C. Nagaraja Pillai, **Deviyin Thiruppaniyalargal**, Folklore Resources and Research Centre, Pallayamkottai, 1999, p.172.

68. K. Devaraj, **Theriyatha Madurai Seithigal** (in Tamil), Madurai, 1980, p.16.

worship, collectively known as adoration ceremonies or Upakaram. Thus, worship might be described as the giving of homage to the presiding deities in the temple. These sixteen acts which are considered to be central to worship are Avakanam (invocation), Stapanam (fixing), Pattivam (water for foot-washing), Asamanam (water for sipping), Arikkiyam (water for hand-washing), Abisekam or Snanam (anointment), Vastiram and Kandham Sattutal (dressing and perfuming), Pushpam Sattutal (offering of flowers), Tupatipam Samarppittal (offering of incense and light), Naivettiyam (offering of food), Pali (sacrifice), Homam (oblation through fire), Nityotsavam (daily festival), Vattiyam (music), Nadanam (dance) and Utvasanam (send off or end).<sup>69</sup> The tradition of the Upahara Puja is continued to this day in the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple. The above sixteen rites are variously combined in a wide variety of specific ritual contexts in the temple. Tamil Vidu Tutu, a literary work mentions that during the Upahara Pujas, Upakara Deepas were lit and other Upahara materials were also offered. It also listed out the Upakara materials used in the pujas and the lamps with their significance. Daily worship is to be conducted according to Parartha Nittya Puja rules expounded in the Saivite Kamika and Karana Agamas. These rules suggest three governing principles for daily worship.<sup>70</sup> Puja must be regular and daily; Puja must be fixed and pre arranged; and Puja must be on behalf of and for the benefit of the cosmos from its inception to

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69. Carol Appadurai, ***Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple Worship and Endowment in South India 1833- 1925***, Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1976, P.90.

70. A.V.Jeyachandran, ***Madurai Temple Complex***, Madurai, 1985, p.224.



its end. In the Meenakshi Sundareswar temple, the daily worship (Nityam) is conducted according to Kamika- Karana Agama rules and is practically the same as they are in many Shiva Temples. There are Shivachariyars (Saiva priests) who learned Vedas to perform puja. Seven main shrines where daily pujas were offered are mentioned in the Srithalam and in the early records of British administration. These shrines refer to Sundareswarar and Meenakshi Shrine, Siddhi Vinayakar, Dakshinamurthi, Sataiyappar, Bhairavar and Surya- Chandrar. The Abhisheka materials include honey, tender coconuts, two sorts of sandal, plantain fruits, patcha karpuram, civet, sugar, curds, parimala dravyam (scents) and vibhuti. During the day the Nityotsavar (Pallakku Chokkar), was taken in procession three times a day round the prakarams of the temple with music and all honours. These pujas and customs are still observed every day.<sup>71</sup> In the Nagara mandapa a drum (murasu) is kept which makes a loud musical sound. It indicates the time of the pujas in the Meenakshi temple to the devotees. In order to beat this drum, the Telugu melakkarrar family was invited from Kumbakonam by Acharya, the minister of Rani Mangammal. The Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple receives six times pujas every day, namely Thiruvananthal, Vila Puja and Kalasanthi, Thirikalasanthi and Utchikalam, Sayarachai, Aarthajama Puja and Palliarai Puja. It is unique that during each puja Goddess Meenakshi reveals in various forms.<sup>72</sup> Thiruvananthal is the morning puja. The temple is opened at 5.00 am and Thiruvananthal puja starts at 5.30

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71. V.Vedachalam and C. Bose, **Thirumalai Mannar Keiyedu** (Tamil), Chennai, 1984, p.18.

72. T. Vijayaraghunathan, **The Great Temple of Madurai**, Madurai, 2002, p.83

am with the worship of Siddhi Vinayakar. Lord Sundareswara and Gooddness Meenakshi are woken up from the Palliarai and it is called Thirupalli Ezhuchi.<sup>73</sup> Lord Sundareswarar's feet, which were kept in the previous night, are brought in a palanquin to the sanctum of the Godshrine from Palliarai ceremonially. Then the puja starts for Gooddness Meenakshi. The carbuncle (a precious stone) nose stud of the Gooddness Meenakshi which was removed and placed on the forehead in the previous day night is transferred to the nose again in the morning. It emphasises that the power of the Mulavar Amman is transferred to the Urchava image in the night and is brought back in the morning. This is called as 'Mookkutti Deeparatani'. This is a unique event only in the Madurai temple. When the palanquin reaches the God's shrine at about 5.45 am, the sanctum Santorum is opened and puja is performed for Sundareswarar.<sup>74</sup> During the Thiruvananthal Puja Goddess Meenakshi is in the form of 'Maha Sodasi'. There is no bathing ceremony during this puja. At the end of this puja, sacred milk (gnanapal) is distributed to the devotees as prasadam at Nalvar Shrine. Vila Puja and Kalasanthi puja is held between 6.30 and 7.10 am for Goddess Meenakshi and 6.40 am and 7.20 am for Lord Sundareswarar. Abhishekam (Holy bath) is held for Vinayaga, Subramaniam, Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar. Holy water is brought from the river vaigai for the Abhishekam. It is performed with the rituals like

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73. Ibid., p.85

74. T.Vijayaragunathan, ***Meenakshi Sundare swarar Thirukoil Naal Vazhipadu matrum Pujaikaalangal***, Kumbabhishekam Souvenir, Madurai, 2009, p.131.

Snapanam, Punyakavasanam and Agni kariyam.<sup>75</sup> Nithyakni and Nitya Pali are given during this puja. Sri Pali Nayaki is taken in a palanquin around the second prahara of Amman Shrine and reaches the Pali Peedam (Altar platform) in the flag staff. Nitya pali(boiled rice ball) is offered and shownDeeparatanai (Harathi). Then it is taken to the sanctum sanctorum of the Goddess Meenakshi shrine and Puja is performed. The same procedure is followed in the Sundareswarar Shrine. Then Gaja (Elephant) Puja and Ko (cow) Puja is held. Sri Meenakshi worship Lord Shiva in the form of a cow, is called as Ko Puja. According to puranas, cow is the living place for all Gods and Devas. It emphasizes that when Sri Meenakshi worship Lord Shiva, it is like worshipping by all living being and the Devas. It also denotes that like the mother takes medicine for the disease of her child Goddess Meenakshi worship Lord Shiva for the sake of her children in the world. Worshipping a cow is equal to worshipping all the Gods. At this time a priest brings a cow to the altar of the Goddess Meenakshi shrine, wears garland, do special puja and feed the cow. This puja is performed between 6.30 am and 7.10 am behind a curtain cloth. It is a convention that Goddess Meenakshi takes the form of Paalai and Bhuvanai during this time. Puja is performed between 6.40 am and 7.30 am for Lord Sundareswarar.<sup>76</sup> Thirukalasanthi and Utchikkalam puja is performed at the day time from 10.30 am to 11.10 am at MeenakshiShrine and 10.40 am to 11.20 am at Lord Sundareswarar Shrine. Two puja pots are filled with water at Yagasala and Vedas are recited

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75. S.Meiyappan, **Madurai Meenatchi**, Manivasakar Pathippagam, Chennai, 2009,p.75.

76. K. Palaniappan, **The Great Temple of Madurai**, Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareswarar Thirukkoil, Madurai, 2012, p.128.

by the priest to bring holiness. Then Abhishekam is held for both Goddess and God by that holy water.<sup>77</sup> Soda Soupasara Deeparathanai is shown during this puja. After performing puja to the Goddess a priest surrounded by persons playing Nathaswaram and Tavandai (a drum like musical instrument), Theevatti (a torch with fire), water in a small kalasa and boiled rice as nivedyam, goes round the praharas and performs puja for all the parivara deities, and again reaches the Meenakshi Shrine. Nathaswaram(air), Tavandai(sound-sky), Theevatti(fire), Boiled rice(which come from land) and water denotes the Pancha bhuthas or five elements namely wind, sky, fire,land and water. It emphasizes that Goddess Herself worships all the parivara deities. This is called as 'Alavattam'.<sup>78</sup> In the early days the priest went with a picture of a cow during this puja assuming that Goddess Meenakshi Herself, in the form a cow does the puja. This was called Ko Puja. Nivedyam is offered to the deities and prasadam is distributed to all the devotees. A scheme has been started for this prasadam distribution by the temple authorities. During this puja Goddess Meenakshi is in the form of Shyamala and Matangi.<sup>79</sup> Sayaratchai Puja is held between 4.30 pm and 5.00 pm in Goddess Meenakshi Shrine and between 4.40 pm and 5.20 pm in God's Shrine. It is also called as Evening

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77. S.Malarvizhi, ***Amman Kovilkalin Varalarum Vazhipadum*** (Madurai Managar) Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 2010, p.179.

78. T.Vijayaragunathan, ***Meenakshi Sundare swarar Thirukoil Naal Vazhipadu matrum Pujaikaalangal***, Kumbabhishekam Souvenir, Madurai, 2009, p.231.

79. Gligor.M. ***Performing puja in Hinduism. The achievement of identity between God and worshiper***.Series Humanistica, 2009 8, 275-285

puja and pradosa period puja. It is performed with Avahanam and Abishekam. The same procedure of Utchikala Puja is followed during this time also. Goddess Meenakshi gives dharshan in the form of Suha Shyamala at this puja.<sup>80</sup> The Artha Jama puja is held from 7.30 to 8.10 pm for Goddess Meenakshi and from 7.40 to 8.20 pm for Lord Sundareswarar. This puja is famous in the Madurai temple.<sup>81</sup> During this puja Goddess Meenakshi is weared white silk saree and white flowers. She is in the aspect of Panchata Satchari with gracious look. At this puja also Abhishekam is done to the deities. Palliarai puja is performed prior to the closing of the temple at night. When the puja bell ring at about 9.00 pm at the Anukkai Vinayaka Shrine at the second prahara of Chokkanatha shrine, the feet of Sundareswarar are carried in a silver palanquin to the shrine of Meenakshi. After the removal of the Lord's feet the sanctum doors of God's shrine are closed. The procession goes around the second prahara and reaches the Kambattadi mandapam. There the temple accountant reads the account of the day. Here Vedic hymns, Tevaram and Tiruvasakam songs are recited.<sup>82</sup> After performing Upakara puja at this place, the palanquin accompanied by music of Nathaswaram and chanting Thirumurai by Othuvars moves over a cloth spread on the floor to the entrance of Meenakshi shrine. On the way Deeparathanai is shown at some places. Then Deeparathanai is shown to

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80. Narasaiah ,Aalavai – **Madurai Managarathin Kadhai**.(Tamil 2009, Madurai,p.85.

81. K.Rajanayagam, **Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundare swarar Thirukkoil ThirukkadanannerattuPeruvizha 2009**, Kumbabishekam Souvenir, Madurai, 2009,p.67

82. P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, **South Indian Festivities**, New Delhi, 1989,p.35

Goddess Meenakshi. Her carbuncle nose stud is removed and placed on Her forehead. This is called 'Mookkutti Kalattal'. There is a convention that the power of Mulavar Amman is transferred to the Palliarai Amman by doing so.<sup>83</sup> During this time a puja is held to the feet of Lord Sundareswarar in the palanquin by a priest and then the priest carries the Lord's feet to the Palliarai. The doors of Meenakshi shrine are closed. After Upakarapuja with Sodasobasara Deeparathanai and music, the doors of the Palliarai are closed. Prasadams of boiled cereals, milk and sacred ash are distributed to the devotees.<sup>84</sup> The Palliarai puja though common in all Shiva temples, it is at Madurai it seems to have originated, known from the fact that in all Shiva Shrine the Palliarai deity is called Amsabhudi Chokkar, irrespective of the name of the Lord of the shrine. Chokkar being the name of the deity of Madurai, it means that the Palliarai puja in all temples repeated the myth of the Madurai temple.<sup>85</sup> Again the Lord's feet are removed from Palliarai and returned to the Lord Sundareswarar Shrine ceremonially in the next morning. Thus the temple doors are opened at 5.00 a.m and starts with Thiruvananthal puja at 5.30 a.m at Goddess Meenaskshi shrine. When the Palliarai palanquin reaches the Lord Sundareswarar shrine the day puja begins. From 12.30 to 4.00 pm. the temple doors are closed and again opened at 4.00pm and pujas are performed. At 10.30pm the temple doors are closed at night. The time schedule of the daily puja may be changed during the festival time. If the procession goes to other mandapas outside

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83. S.Sambasivam, **Maanagar Madurai** (in Tamil), Madurai, 1960, p.127.

84. R.Champakalakshmi, **The Hindu Temples**, New Delhi, 1991, p.56.

85. T.G.S.Balaji Iyer, **History and Description of Sri Meenakshi Amman Temple**, Madurai, 1996, p.34.

the end of Kalasanthi puja and Sayratchai (evening puja), Meenakshi Amman is decorated with diomand crown and gold cavacha. These adorn the temple it starts only after the evening puja. Arthajama and Palliarai pujas will be held after the deities return to the temple.<sup>86</sup> Every Monday at the Goddess from 7.00 am to 10 am and from 4.30 pm to 7.30 pm to witness the devotees. This practice was introduced by P.T.Rajan in 1972.<sup>87</sup> Pujas are performed for Goddess Durga on every Tuesday and Friday at the Rahu kalam which comes between 3.00 -4.30 pm. on every Tuesday and between 10.30 and 12.00 am on every Friday. Lemon is cut into half and made as a small bowl like. In that, oil or ghee is poured and lit as a lamp which is placed on a platform in front of the Goddess Durga. They decorate the place with kolam. The Unjal mandapam contains a swing on which the golden image of Lord Shiva and Goddess Meenakshi are placed on every Friday for the weekly darshan (glimpse). The appropriate Tevaram songs are recited while swinging the Unjal.<sup>88</sup>

A special puja known as 'Paksha Valipadu' (Pradhosha Puja) is performed once in fifteen days. It denotes the meeting time of day and night. When the day time ends and the night time starts, it is called the dusk time and is also called 'PratyushaKalam'. Pradhosham<sup>89</sup> is a period of three hours- 11 | 2 hours before and 11 | 2 hours after the sun set.<sup>90</sup> Lord Shiva swallowed

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86. N.S.Ramaswamy, **Temples of South India**, Chennai, 1984, p.109.

87. S.Malarvizhi, **Amman Kovilkalin Varalarum Vazhipadum (Madurai Managar)** Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 2010, p.179.

88. Ibid., p.185

89. Pradhosham is a Sanskrit word. Pra-huge or big, dhosham- harm.

90. V.Narayana Swami, **Pradhosha Vazhipadu**, , Chennai, 2002, p.65.

poison at this time. Every month Pradosham occurs in Chaturthi, two days before the new moon day and at Thriyodasi, two days before the full moon day. On these days the Pradhosha time comes from 4.30 to 6.00 pm. This puja is performed for Lord Shiva. Abisheka is performed with sandal paste, rose water, milk, panchamirtham, vibhuthi, honey, sugarcane juice, rice flour, curd and tender coconut.<sup>91</sup> The saivites, during that time, should worship God Nandhi, by adoring the God with a garland of arugampul, vilva leaves, jasmine and marukkozhundhu. A virata, strictly speaking means a vow, and the devotee is expected to take up a moral decision on that day which he should follow in his life. Such a devotee will be blessed with a banded grace of God Shiva. The monthly pujas refers to certain pujas which occur once in a month. In the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple the maha sankranthi puja is performed on the first day of every month. On this day, the Urchava Amman is placed in a golden car and taken into procession around the four Adi Streets at the end of the evening puja. The procession car reaches Thirukkalyana mandapam and special puja is performed there. If a devotee wishes to see and pull the procession car other than the first day of the month, he has to pay Rs.2000/ to the temple.<sup>92</sup> The Pournami puja is performed on the full moon day of every month. In the evening, a special puja is performed for Goddess Meenakshi with kumkum archanai. Lalita Sahshra Namam and other devotional songs are recited during this time. During the Kumbhabishekam ritual temporary pavilions are

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91. Ibid p. 68

92. K.Rajanayagam, **Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareswarar Thirukkoil ThirukkadaNannerattuPeruvizha** 2009, Kumbabishekam Souvenir, Madurai, 2009.p.123



constructed which contains fire-sacrifice halls (yagasala) and fire pits (kunda) made in various specified shapes by building low, enclosing brick walls.<sup>93</sup> For instance during the Kumbhabishekam of 1963, 110 fire pits were made and 203 Shivachariyars from all over Tamilnadu along with Thiruvaduthurai Adhinam and 103 Shastries were brought from various Districts to chant the four Vedas, Othuvams to sing Tevaram and Thiruvagasam with musical instruments. During the Kumbhabishekam of 1974, 128 Shivachariyas from various temples of Tamil Nadu came for Yagasalai the temple are now 'empty' artifacts, and Meenakshi Sundareswarar and other subsidiary deities are now installed in the yagasala.<sup>94</sup> A series of eight rituals of sacrifice worship (Yaga Puja) begins and on the following three days the ritual (lasting about one to two hours) are performed in the morning and evening. Each sacrificial fire-one in each pit-is the responsibility of a single priest, although two men, the principal priests (PradhanaAcharyar) of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar have particularly important role. During the course of the fire sacrifice each priest spend most of his time spooning ghee in the fire, periodically adding more wood and dropping in different items (grains, legumes, cooked rice, fruits etc.,) as oblations.<sup>95</sup> Towards the end of the sacrifice, the pradhana acharyas lowered silk sarees and dhothis (vesti) offered to Meenakshi and

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93. P.R.Ramanathan Chettiar, ***Ashtabandanam Enappadum Marundhu Sathuthal***, Kumbabishekam Souvenir, Madurai, 2009, p.150.

94. George Michell, The Hindu Temple-***An introduction to its meaning and forms***, New Delhi, 1977.p.57

95. N.S.Sundararaman, ***Madurail Navarathri Vizha***, Navarathri Malar, Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, Madurai, 1967, p. 193.

Sundareswarar into the fire, before the entire priest made the final oblations. The ritual concludes with the display of lamps that ends any act of worship in the temple.<sup>96</sup> In the series of fire sacrifices, the divine power in the water pots are progressively augmented; this process-compared withrecharging a battery by practically minded priests – is crucial in the renovation ritual. After the deities power has been moved into the water pots, worship inside the temple are stopped. The empty images can be repaired by artisans and re-fixed to their bases with special medicine of eight materials. After the last sacrifice worship, groups of priests carries the water pots in procession into the temple and puja, 30 priests for reciting Vedas and 50 Othuvars for reciting Thirumurais.<sup>97</sup> After a series of preparatory rites, the priests ritually moved the deities' power (sakti) from their images inside the temple into water pots (kumbha) which are then carried to their respective alters in the fire- sacrifice halls. The images inside up to the narrow roofs of the twelve gateway towers.<sup>98</sup> At an auspicious time; a priest pours the first pot of water over the gilded finial (vimana). A green flag is waved to tell others to pour their pots over Sundareswarar shrine's vimana and on the other towers; at the same time, the priests inside the temple pour their pots over the images. This vast simultaneous effusion, the concluding climax of the renovation ritual is greeted by excited cheering from the crowds in the temple and on the surrounding buildings

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96. Ibid.p.195

97. D.Devakunjari, **Madurai through the Ages**, MeenakshiSundareswarar Thirukkoil, Madurai, 2004, pp.156 to 160

98. A.K. Paranthamanar, **Madurai Nayakkar Varalaru** (in Tamil), Chennai, 1966, p.279

and those lucky enough to be near the towers try to douse themselves in the water sprinkled down.<sup>99</sup> By emptying the pots, all the increased power in the water is made to flow back into the temple as a whole both to the towers and the newly secured images housed with inside the main shrines, worship then starts. Thus the Kumbhabhishekam comes to an end. The deities and the temple has been restored to normal, but the divine power contains within its restored fabric has been enhanced. In Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple the bhattars services (Kainkariam) consist of two classes of rights: Puja rights and sthanam rights.<sup>100</sup> Puja rights involve attending to the worship ceremonies and ritual conducted in the temple. In these ceremonies the needs of the deity are tended: bathing (abishekam), adorning (alankaram), offering (nivedyam), praising (archanam), and showing the light (diparathanam) to both the sanctum sanctorum image (mulavar) and to the movable, processional image (utsavar) of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar. Sthanam rights, on the other hand, consist of superintending and managing certain of the internal operations of the temple. The distribution of these puja and sthanam rights among the bhattars of Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple is determined by hereditary membership in one of two groups: the Vikrama Pandya Bhattars and the Kulasekara Bhattars. The Vikrama Pandya branch controls the rights to perform priest duties for the original, immovable image of the deity in the sanctum sanctorum. They also have a

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99. R.SathyanaathaAiyar, ***History of the Nayaks of Madura***, University of Madras, 1980, p. 37

100. N.S.Ramaswami, ***Temples of South India***, Maps and Agencies Publications, Madras, 1984, p.145.

monopoly on the archanam rights for the processional deity.<sup>101</sup> The Kulasekara Bhattars branch holds rights for the office of alankarathar. This office consists of adorning the processional image on festival occasions (kaivistharam). Each branch has attached to it two sthanikar offices. The individual bhattars in both groups may be identical as the same man in some instances holds rights in both divisions due to mortgage or to alienation of those rights. To get the blessings of the deities for the quick recovery of patients at the emergency wards of the Government hospitals, Madurai joint prayers are conducted at 5.30 p.m. on every Fridays. These unique prayers were inaugurated on 8.11.2001 under the chairmanship of Minister for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment, Hon. P.C. Ramasamy in the presence of the HR and CE Secretary Mr. P.A. Ramiah IAS and other officials.<sup>102</sup> The final category of worship is private worship. Under the rubric of Kamiya puja or archanai, single persons tender their offerings of select upakaram items such as flowers, fruits, incense and saffron to the divine couple. This is done while the names of or titles of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar are being recited either 108 or 1008 times. In two respects, archanai ritual is distinct. First, an archanai offering is made in the name of a person designated by the donor. Unlike daily worship, which is intended to be for the entire cosmos, archanai worship is meant to be for the benefit of the single person.<sup>102</sup> Second, because archanai is the concern of the individual, its regularity depends on the prerogative of

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101. R.SathyanathaAiyar, ***History of the Nayaks of Madura***, University of Madras, 1980, p.15

102. D.Devakunjari, ***Madurai through the ages***, Madurai, 1979.p.176

the worshipper. The motivation behind the presentation of archanai offerings is diverse and varied.<sup>103</sup> They are occasioned by a crises (illness, court case, poverty and so on), a change in status (marriage, parenthood, student hood and so on) and out of gratitude on the part of a worshipper for a boon or blessing received from the divine couple. Visvanatha Nayak gave the right of performing all rituals and ceremonies in the Meenakshi Temple, to the Chief, of Madurai Atheenam.<sup>104</sup> Since then the temple activities increased. Being the disciples of the mutts, the Nayak Kings were enriched with Tamil scholarship and their close association enabled them to pursue and promote Tamil culture. Through the mutts, religious activities such as religious discourses, preachings, teachings and recital of religious hymns in Tamil, increased. The Nayak Kings learned Tamil traditions, customs and conventions which had its impacts on their rule and mode of life in the Tamil country. Their contact and close association with mutts not only enabled the Tamils to renew and revive their ancient culture and religion, but also paved way for unity, harmony and peaceful co-existence of different races and linguistics, under the purview of religion.<sup>105</sup> Religious tours of the Kings, courtiers, priests and chiefs of mutts attracted pilgrims and temples became the centres of Tamil culture.<sup>106</sup> The mutts, the radiating centres of the religious philosophy and

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103. George Michell, ***The Hindu Temple-An introduction to its meaning and forms***, New Delhi, 1977, p.84

104. T.G.S. Balaram Iyer, and T. R. Rajagopalan. ***History & description of Sri Meenakshi Temple***. (1987),4-5.

105. Crispin Branfoot. "***Approaching the Temple in Naya ka-Period Madurai: The Kūtal Alakar Temple.***" *Artibus Asiae* 60.2 (2000), 197

106. *Ibid.*, p.199

principles make the people to get mental purification and attainment of peace and happiness. These religious centres serve as feeding centres for brain and vision, as they developed fine arts like music and dance. During the Nayak age, mutts were there at Madurai, Trichinopoly and Thirukkalukundram, which were patronised by some of the Nayak Kings like Thirumalai Nayak and Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak. Madurai, the cultural pivot of the Nayak age, was an abode for religious interaction from the ancient past, as it was most sacred city of the Hindus. So many Mutts sprang up around Meenaskhi Temple in order to propagate Hindu religious philosophy. One such mutts that flourished during the reign of Thirumalai Nayak was Dharmapuram Atheenam in the North Masi Street at Madurai.<sup>107</sup> The heads of this Mutt were adorned with a suffix in their name as Desikar, which means spiritual preceptor. Now, Gurusamy Desikar is the head of this Mutt, and according to him, his ancestors hailed from Dharmapuram and they were notable musicians, famous for chanting Devararam and Thiruvagasam hymns and so they were invited to Madurai by King Thirumalai Nayak. He appointed them Oduvars or Musicians to Meenakshi temple and now the Oduvar of Meenakshi Temple is Gurusamy Desikar and his son.<sup>108</sup> The duty of the Oduvar is to chant Devaram and Thiruvagasam hymns in the temple, to invoke God during the time of daily poojas and on special occasions. The main duty of the head of the Dharmapuram Mutt, is mutt, at North Masi Street, at free of cost. Thus it imparts the principles of

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107. Annual Report of the Madurai Adheenam 2003-2004, Madurai, pp.27-32. 260

108. Interview with Gurusamy Desikar, the Oduvar of Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, 10 May 2001.

saivism to the people.<sup>109</sup> Common to teach the philosophy and greatness of Saivism and to produce enlightened religious scholars. Religious discourses and concerts are arranged. Regular religious classes are conducted in the premises of the prayers and religious meetings are arranged twice a month, on the days of pradosam, the holy days for the Saivaites. Besides that, special classes are conducted in order to teach people, how to perform poojas and rituals on festival days such as Sivarathiri and Thiruvathirai.<sup>110</sup> The youths are trained with virtues like good character, discipline and purity by imparting and preaching ethics and morals. As this mutt at Madurai, has its link with its parent mutt at Dharmapuram, it is able to collect the books published there and to distribute the same to the devotees and disciples. It has enlightened the younger generation and guided them to inspire the lofty thoughts of the scholars and poets of Saivism. This mutt became the centre of religious learning and preaching and pivot of social unity and integrity. Thus this Mutt, initiated and patronised by Thirumalai Nayak, is still continuing its services, to humanity and religion, at Madurai.<sup>111</sup> The peaceful atmosphere and the royal assistance gave impetus to the rise of monasterial activities. Like that of the Dharmapuram Atheenam, the Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam has established its branch at Madurai. The dedicated saints of this mutt, carried out various social and

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109. Interview with G. Manikantan, The Oduvar of Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, 15, May, 2023. 261

110. D.Dayalan, ***Early Temples of Tamil Nadu, Their Role in Socio – Economic Life***, New Delhi, 1992, p.66.

111. M.Thangavel Desikar, “***Maduraikkoil Aparanankal***”, Madurai Temple Complex, Kumbabhisekha Souvenir, p.90.

religious activities. This mutt is functioning with the endowment, created, during the reign of Thirumalai Nayak, called in the name of its donor, Thanakonneriyappa Mudaliar, who was the contemporary of Thirumalai Nayak and the Dalavay of Raja Ravivarma of Travancore.<sup>112</sup> In order to honour the valour of Thanakonneriyappa for his military services, Thirumalai Nayak granted 16 villages as a gift to him. Thanakonnerippa was pleased with that honour and he donated those villages to Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam at Madurai, which was established by him. He also created an endowment called Thanakonneriyappa Mudaliar Endowment Trust and made the Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam of Tiruvavaduthurai as its heritary trustee, of that endowment, in 1658 A.D.<sup>113</sup> The property of this trust, includes wet and dry lands in Karur Taluk and fertile lands at Virattipattu and Achampattu in Madurai, which was the main source of revenue for this Mutt. But in Madurai, this trust erected shops and meditation hall in an area of 45 cents in the heart of the city, near the West Tower of the Meenakshi Temple, called Thanappa Mudali Street. This street is called after the name of Thanakonneriyappa Mudaliar and it is now corrupted and called Thanappa Mudali Street. This trust wons houses and sites in Tirupparankundram and lands worth of 40 acres.<sup>114</sup> The Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam at Madurai, arranged religious conferences for

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112. A.V.Jeyechandran, **Temples as Cultural Centres**, Mysore, 1990, p.204

113. T.Vijayaragunathan, **“Meenakshi Sundareswarar Thirukoil Naal VazhipadumatrumPujaikaalangal”**, Kumbabhisheka Souvenir, Madurai, 2009, p.231.

114. Durasisai, **Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenathin Samaya Samudappanigal** (in Tamil), Thiruvavaduthurai, p.19.



religious integrity and unity, during the period of the Nayaks.<sup>115</sup> Through this Mutt, the Nayak Kings supplied holy materials like kum-kum, viputhi and sandal perfumes to temples, for poojas.<sup>116</sup> The Madathipathi or the head Guru, has arranged to carry on the task of teaching the Devaram, Thiruvagasam hymns or devotional songs through music and fine arts, unmindful of its sources of income.<sup>117</sup> This Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam was carrying out various socio-religious activities, to inspire the people to religious movement and Hindu Bhakthi cult in the Nayak Kingdom. The income from the Thanakonneriyappa Endowment Trust was spent for the activities of the Mutt.<sup>118</sup> A portion of this income was spent for one time pooja in a day, daily at Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, Madurai and Murugan Temple, Thirupparan-kundram.<sup>119</sup> This Atheenam also meets the expenditure, incurred for poojas performed on prodhosa days, at Meenakshi Temple. It meets the expenses of the celebrations of festivals such as Chithirai festival, Puttu Thiruvila festival, Navarathiri festival, Karthigai festival and Markali Nonbu festival at Meenakshi temple every year. The expenses for feeding and maintaining the elephant are also met out by this

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115. Thanakonneriyappa Mudaliar Kattalai – ***Thorramum Varalarum*** (in Tamil), Thiruvavaduthurai Athenam, 1982, p.20.

116. Ibid., p.25

117. Interview with M. Shanmugam, the Executive of Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenam at Madurai, on 30, April 2020.

118. Ibid

119. Herag Henry, ***South India under Vijayanagar Empire***, Vol.I and II, New Delhi, 1980, p.70.

Atheenam.<sup>120</sup> This mutt, meets the expenses incurred for the celebration of annual festivals such as Vaikasi Visakam, Karthikai Theepam, Float festival, Kanthasasti festival and Panguni Uthiram at Murugan Temple, Tirupparankundram.<sup>121</sup> This mutt takes constant efforts for religious activities at Madurai. It provides free meals, cloths and other needy materials to the people who are in distress. It helps the orphanage and poor homes at Tirupparankundram. The income from the endowment trust of Thanakonneriyappa Mudaliar, is utilised by this Mutt for the Duraisai. cause of religious awakening social awareness and educational development in Madurai city. Further it is serving as a place of charity to the poor, destitutes and aged. It is also an abode for saints and scholars to teach, learn, propagate and preach Hinduism.<sup>122</sup>

To perform the adoration in a successful manner a group of people named the Yadavas or the Konars settled in Madurai during the tenure of Thirumalai Nayak. They were also called Idayans. Their main occupation was cattle rearing and they originally belonged to Tinnevely. In order to get more milk and ghee for the poojas (rituals) and ceremonies in the temples and to fulfill the needs of the Brahmins and also to offer the excreta of the cattles as manure for lands to enrich the fertility of the soil

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120. Interview with Velayutham, Public Relations Officer, Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, on 26.01.2023.

121. Interview with Santhanam, Temple Official, Thirupparankundram Temple, on 30.01.2023. 264

122. Thiruvavaduthurai Atheenathin Samaya Samuthaya Samayappanigal (in Tamil), Thiruvavaduthurai, 1990, p.19.

they were required.<sup>123</sup> Thirumalai Nayak assigned hamlets to this migrated under the custody of the Yadava people and the street is called Ramayana Chavadi street.<sup>124</sup> As the Yadavas or Konars were staunch Vaishnavaites, Yadavas or Idayans of Tinnevely, at North Masi Street, in Madurai, where still this caste people are living in plenty. He also built Ramayana Chavadi where they could perform, sing and enact scenes, connected with God Vishnu in the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharatha. Still that Choultry is the Nayak kings constructed the Navaneetha Krishnan temple at North Masi Street in Madurai, and granted lands and a pond at Thiruppalai village, to this temple for its maintenance and for the celebration of the Thirthavari festival or Theppam festival. Even now the deity God Navaneetha Krishnan is taken to the pond at Thiruppalai for this Thirthavari festival. In some villages, called Idayakottai and Idayapatty near Usilampatty, these groups of people live in large number. Even now, Idayankottai is famous for cattlerearing and dairy milk - farming in the Madurai district.<sup>125</sup> The Yadavas or Konars or Idayans promoted the growth of agriculture and cattle-rearing in the Nayak kingdom. The Nayakkars or Naidus who settled at Ayakudi near Palani were Kammavars, who too are famous for cattle rearing and dairy-milk farming.<sup>126</sup>

Thus the adoration and rituals were performed during the tenure of Nayaks In a successful manner.

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123. D.Devakunjari, ***Madurai through the Ages, Meenakshi Sundareswarar Thirukkcoil***, Madurai, 2004, pp.190 to 216

124. K.Devaraj, ***Theriyatha Madurai Seithigal*** (in Tamil), Madurai, 1980, p.16.

125. Ibid.,p.19

126. Ibid., p.20



